



DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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To: VP-PW

ANALYST

Could you have one of the Analysts provide comments
for the end? Also, we need to get together
briefly to discuss how we would like
to handle the acquisition of copies of the film.

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FLAKE



SCOTT BARNES: MY FAVORITE FLAKE

by Alan Dawson

SPRING 83

Scott Barnes says he came to Thailand to take part in a secret operation to assassinate American spooks in Laos. I suppose I'll always remember Scott Barnes most of all for his swim across the Thai-Cambodia border. The fact that there is no place to swim across the border is why I'll remember him.

He may be remembered in history, however, for a more sinister reason. In the past few months, a couple of the more unscrupulous sources of information around claim that Barnes was the main actor in what can only be called a thrilling story. Only trouble is the story doesn't stand up, exciting though it may be.

If the weirdos among us have their way, Scott Barnes will gain a reputation as the leader of a super-secret mission to Laos. These weirdos are, for now, two publications whose background, funding and past performance should — but do not always — disqualify them as legitimate sources of information. They are the *Covert Action Information Bulletin* and the *New York Daily World*.

CAIB is published by the person who gave you Philip Agee, the CIA traitor. It spends much of its time printing names, addresses and other confidential information on American CIA employees, especially those overseas. It says it is against secret intelligence operations. It is, in fact, only against American secrecy. So far as can be learned, it has never yet printed so much as a mild rebuke of a KGB operative, let alone any names.

The *Daily World* is the American Communist Party's newspaper, founded in 1968.

According to these two paragons of journalistic reporting, Scott Barnes is the hero of a story which involves the U.S. government's allegedly planting "yellow rain" samples in Laos. They also say that the second of two American-run infiltration missions in Laos in 1981 to search for prisoners of war was sent to search for — and if necessary assassinate — the first.

TASS, the Vietnam News Agency and communist publications interested in denying Soviet involvement in the use of chemical-biological warfare in Indochina and Afghanistan have helped CAIB and the *Daily World* spread the story of the highly questionable Scott Barnes.

Barnes arrived in Bangkok in mid-1981 and telephoned me. He said he

If the weirdos among us have their way, Scott Barnes will gain a reputation as the leader of a super-secret mission to Laos.

was a friend of Bo Gritz, and asked if I would meet him. Gritz, I knew, had a name well-known in two circles: He was a Special Forces and special operations warfare officer, and he was a fanatical searcher for the American POWs he believes are still held by Vietnam, most probably in Laos.

Barnes asked me to meet him at the Nana Hotel, a favorite hangout of Southeast Asian adventurers for years, because he didn't have any money to come see me.

He was a friendly guy, apparently ex-military. He had the build of a Charles Atlas advertisement, the man kicking the sand, not the one getting it in the face. And he had the carriage of a man who has seen action. His beard suited him and added believability to his story that he was an ex-SEAL, the "animals" of the U.S. Navy, where beards are permitted. Later, he told two other people that he had been in SF in Vietnam, and for all I know he told others he was a Marine and an Air Force PJ man.

He pulled out — I swear it — an old Thailand-Laos-Cambodia road map, like the Esso stations used to sell.

He was going to Laos to hunt POWs, he told me in short. He asked my help in some administrative routine. And he had a fantastic story, which went on at some length.

His baggage had been stolen, which was highly plausible, but the story was odd. His scheduled hotel car did not pick him at at Don Muang Airport, he said, but another car did, and the driver called him by name. As he pulled up to the hotel, two Thai soldiers ran out of its coffeeshop door, past his car, firing their M16s in the air. At this diversion, as Barnes dove for cover, the car and driver fled with his baggage. He said \$15,000 was in it.

This was obviously, Barnes said, a U.S. government plot because they had somehow found out about his mission and wanted to stop him.

Two major problems made me wonder about Scott right away. First, Thai soldiers rarely are armed with M16s. They carry HK-33s, which look quite different. And second, Barnes couldn't really explain why the \$15,000 was in his suitcase, while he held on to his passport, customs slip, return plane ticket and other important papers.

In fact, *Soldier of Fortune* staffers Tom Reisinger and Fred Zabitovsky, unknown to Barnes, were sitting in the Nana Hotel lobby when he came in. He came in, they reported, like everyone else — by getting out of the taxi, picking up his bags and walking in the door. There was no shooting, no diversion and no theft — but he did have luggage.

It turned out Barnes had two names and telephone numbers to contact in Bangkok. One was mine, at the *Bangkok Post*. The other was a pregnant Thai desk clerk at the Nana, who was helpful with the routine problems of foreign guests but who, it seems, would not be too much help in organizing a trek of a few hundred miles into Laos to search for POWs.

Barnes briefed me on his mission.

He said that certain intelligence sources — whom he could not, of course, name (fair enough) — had pinpointed the location of American POWs in Laos. He wanted to show me where they were, however, so that I might better offer advice on how to reach the spot undetected for a Barnes-led snatch-and-grab of one or more of the Americans.

He pulled out — I swear it — an old Thailand-Laos-Cambodia road map, like the Esso stations used to sell. He didn't remember the pronunciation, spelling nor location of the place where the Americans were being held, but as I went over the map with him, he suddenly exclaimed when I got to Sam Neua, "That's it, Sam Neua. How do I

FLAKE



**SCOTT BARNES:
MAN OF MYSTERY**
By Donna DuVall and
Jim Graves

In October 1982, Bo Gritz sent a five-man team to Thailand to lay the groundwork for his second POW rescue mission, Grand Eagle. Gritz and the rest of the team planned to join the advance men in November and sneak into Laos to look for POWs. Included in the five who went in October were J.D. Rath, Vinney Arnone and Scott Barnes. Grand Eagle, like its Florida-bound predecessor, Velvet Hammer, fizzled before any rescue mission could be launched.

In fact, the only memorable thing to come from Grand Eagle was the incredible web of intrigue and lies spun by one of the team members, Scott Barnes, on his return home. So incredible was Barnes' tale of CIA clandestine operations to find POWs, assassinate other operatives, plant Yellow Rain samples in Laos and terminate Libya's Mommar Khadafy that only four publications printed his story: *Covert Action Information Bulletin* (CAIB), a leftist journal which concentrates on exposing United States intelligence operations, the *New York Daily World*, the newspaper of the American Communist Party, the *Hermosa Beach, Calif. Easy Reader* and a Canadian newspaper *The Vancouver Herald*.

Upon his return to the United States, Barnes contacted several newspaper and television representatives, including Ted Koppel of ABC-TV's *Nightline* and Jack Anderson, whose syndicated column runs in hundreds of newspapers around the country. Because his story was so fantastic, they interviewed him extensively before determining that there was less to Scott Barnes than met the eye. According to Barnes in his CAIB inter-

get there?"

I explained that Sam Neua was a province, and rather a large one; that it was about as far from Thailand (or as close to Vietnam, if you will) as you could get and still be in Laos, and that I couldn't in my wildest dreams imagine a man walking there and back.

Only listing the most obvious reasons for certain failure, I said that it was a long distance; the mountains were incredible; the climate was

gruesome; the Vietnamese and Pathet Lao armies might take exception to his presence; all Safeway supermarkets along the way had all been closed for lack of business, and food and water could prove difficult to come by.

Well, Barnes didn't think any of those problems were insurmountable.

He wanted two things from me, one at a time. He had to get to the Thai-Cambodia border to meet a Laotian who would give him the actual location

view, he was first contacted by one of Gritz's ex-SOG (Studies and Observation Group) troopers in April 1981 and told to get ready "for a secret invasion into Laos" to rescue POWs. The covert CIA operation, codenamed BOHICA (Bend Over, Here It Comes Again), had the cooperation of U.S. Representative Robert Dornan of California, chairman of the House Committee on POW/MIAs; the CIA chief in Bangkok; and former Laotian Gen. Vang Pao. In fact, Barnes said the reason he was asked to participate was because he was "close friends with both Vang Pao and Rep. Dornan" and that he later arranged a meeting in Dornan's office between Dornan, Gritz, Vang Pao and himself.

Sometime in May 1981, *Soldier of Fortune* Managing Editor Jim Graves took a phone call from Scott Barnes from somewhere in Hawaii. Barnes had read the articles about Operation Velvet Hammer and thought that somehow SOF was involved. Graves assured him that the fiasco was Gritz's, not SOF's, and the publicity came from the media Gritz had brought into the operation. Barnes said he did not know Gritz, but he wanted to help with the POW effort, and asked us to put him touch with "intel and communicator types."

Barnes wouldn't say much about his background, but, as best as Graves remembers, he implied that he was former Special Forces. We turned his number over to Earl Bleacher, a former Special Forces soldier who participated in the Son Tay raid, and asked him to call Barnes and find out what he wanted and what he was really up to. Earl later told Graves that the guy was a flake, and SOF forgot about Barnes.

Until June 1981 that is, when some SOF staffers in Bangkok heard from a source now forgotten that Barnes was en route to Thailand on a Pan Am flight. We assumed that he had indeed contacted Gritz and was working for him on his ongoing POW missions.

SOF staffers Tom Reisinger and Fred Zabitovsky waited in the lobby of the Nana

Hotel, where we knew Barnes was planning to stay. They wanted to get a good look so they could spot him if he showed up near any SOF operations in extreme northern Thailand.

Barnes — about 28, six-foot, 190 pounds, bearded — arrived wearing a safari suit jacket and shorts, and calmly registered at the desk. Neither Reisinger nor Zabitovsky heard or saw anything at all unusual, nor did Barnes appear distressed when he entered the Nana, despite his later claims. SOF did not approach Barnes, and he was unaware of their presence.

Soon after his arrival, Barnes began making the rounds with a concocted story — designed either to impress or raise money — of having his baggage stolen (with \$15,000 in cash inside). As he was disembarking from the car that had brought him from the airport, Barnes claimed, two Thai soldiers ran out of the Nana coffeeshop, firing M16s. As he dove for cover, the car sped off with his luggage and his \$15,000.

Certainly having one's baggage stolen is common in Bangkok, but Barnes could not explain why he had all his cash inside his luggage, while he kept all his important papers (passport, customs slip etc.) in his pockets. Also, both Reisinger and Zabitovsky witnessed his arrival, and there was no gunfire nor speeding automobile. And Barnes walked into the lobby with luggage.

Hearing this tale, SOF Publisher Robert K. Brown and "Mekong" Jim Coyne decided to meet with Barnes late in the week by the Nana pool. After a few minutes, Brown and Coyne agreed with Bleacher's earlier diagnosis of Barnes and avoided him from then on.

Barnes returned from Thailand in the summer of 1981 and sometime before August got in touch with Gritz, if he had not been in touch before. Gritz in the *Easy Reader* article says he first heard from Barnes before Scott left for Thailand in June; his second contact came when Barnes called him for money to get out of Thailand, which Gritz refused.

of the POWs. (I still don't know what a Laotian was doing at the Cambodian border.) Could I help get him to the border, he asked.

And he wanted me to put him in touch with a CIA man.

Barnes seemed to think that getting to the Cambodian border was a clandestine matter, and when I suggested getting a hotel taxi to take him, he was somewhat taken aback. When I told him I had no special access to the

CIA, he was even more disbelieving. The fact that he still insisted that the spooks had engineered the loss of his \$15,000 made his request to talk with them even more peculiar.

Eventually, I called a friend in the U.S. Embassy and said, "I don't know what to do, but there is this person who insists that he wants to talk to the CIA about walking into Laos and rescuing POWs." I learned that U.S. policy appears to be that government officials

are not to talk to free-lance adventurers, and am convinced that Barnes never spoke to any U.S. Embassy officials. (He did speak to officers of the JCRC — Joint Casualty Resolution Center — who deal with POWs and who talk to anybody. They thought he was a weirdo.)

He also overheard the embassy extension that I asked for, and called it up immediately after I left him and asked to speak to a "CIA case officer." When

give. Gritz admits he met with him in California, but hedges on the meeting with Dorman in August and denies any further contact.

According to Barnes, he attended the August meeting with Vang Pao and Gritz in Dorman's office (the record supports this) and then went to Thailand with five or six other Americans. This is also true, as BOHICA team members J.D. Bath and Vinney Arnone have stated.

From the time the Grand Eagle crew reached NKP, piecing the story together gets more difficult. Bath says their contact, presumably a Lao, never showed up. Barnes and another team member got into a fight, reportedly over a piece of camera equipment. By then, the plan was beginning to unravel, tempers were running high and morale low, so they returned to Bangkok. Soon the mission was called off and the members returned to the United States.

As Barnes tells it, he and one other man from BOHICA crossed over into Laos near Mahaxay and confirmed that there were two Americans being held in camp there. Barnes says they got a message from the CIA chief of station in Bangkok and a message from Virginia (CIA?), which when put together, directed them to kill the two Americans. Barnes says this was the reason for the fight: He refused to take part in the killing of the two Americans, while the other guy insisted that they obey their orders. Barnes claims they had AR-180 rifles with silencers. No one else on the team saw them. Barnes claims he came back separately and dropped out of sight, to avoid being terminated by the CIA, until Gritz started appearing in the press about his POW missions, at which point Barnes decided that going public was his best defense against the CIA. He surmised that the reason they were to kill the Americans is because the Americans had gone to Laos under the guise of hunting POWs, but their real mission had been to plant Yellow Rain samples to implicate the USSR of engaging in gas warfare.

How much of Scott Barnes' story is

true?

Just enough to make the unknowledgeable wonder and to give the already committed a story that will stand up if one doesn't bother to check too thoroughly.

Was Barnes a part of Gritz's operation BOHICA? Answer, yes. He has too many details which are true, including the operation name which Gritz admitted in a 1982 radio interview that he coined. In addition, two BOHICA team members, Bath and Arnone, have given statements to *Soldier of Fortune* that Barnes was involved and in Thailand with them.

In several of Barnes' interviews since the fall of 1981, he has claimed — just as Gritz has — that BOHICA was connected to the United States government through an agency called "The Activity." The agency which Gritz and Barnes refer to as the "The Activity" does exist, although not under that name. It was established in the wake of the Iranian rescue mission's failure, in part because the Special Forces group (Delta), which was charged with carrying out the mission, depended upon other organizations (CIA, DIA and NSA) for its intelligence. To prevent further disasters from resulting on future such missions, an organization was created to gather and act on its intelligence. *Editor's Note: While the specific name of this organization and its home base have already been blown by one reporter with connections to Gritz, SOF declines to go any further than the explanation above.*

Was "The Activity" involved in BOHICA, or Grand Eagle — a parallel operation — or perhaps BOHICA under another name? The answer to that is no. Before the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs hearing on POWs, 22 March 1983, Rear Adm. Allen G. Paulson, of the Defense Intelligence Agency, was asked if Gritz ever had any official backing from the government. Paulson replied that after the time of BOHICA or Grand Eagle a proposal was submitted from one intelligence agency to utilize Gritz and his organization in the POW/MIA issue. Paulson stated that the

proposal was routinely brought up for review and was rejected. Since SOF learned from another independent source that any hopes Gritz had of direct government connections were squashed in December 1981, we are convinced "The Activity" was not involved beyond evaluating Gritz and his associates.

Barnes has claimed in CAIB and the Canadian newspaper that they were told to assassinate the two Americans they found in Laos because they were not American POWs from the Vietnam War, but really two CIA agents caught planting Yellow Rain gas samples. The United States reportedly planned to use the samples to accuse Russia and Vietnam of using chemicals in violation of the Geneva Convention. In his CAIB account, Barnes said the two men, seen near Mahaxay, Laos, were in the same area where the Yellow Rain samples cited by former Secretary of State Alexander Haig in his 1981 accusation that the USSR was using chemical weapons were collected. In the *Vancouver Herald*, the British Columbia newspaper which printed Barnes' story on 5 January 1983, Barnes added that the area where the men were held was the same area where *Soldier of Fortune* picked up its Yellow Rain sample, which was one of those used by Haig.

Barnes' Yellow Rain story has a major flaw: Our sample was obtained in Thailand, well over 200 miles from Mahaxay. Furthermore, the Soviet attack that produced the sample took place in North-western Laos, not central Laos where Mahaxay is.

The real mystery of Scott Barnes is not that he was secret agent working for Gritz and "The Activity," but how on earth he was able to fool anybody. But then maybe the only ones he really fooled were Bo Gritz and a few radical newspapers.

Much like Allen Dawson of *The Bangkok Post*, we'll always remember Scott Barnes as "The man who swam a river that wasn't there on a trip he never took for a government that never knew."

FLAKE



Barnes is the first person in recorded history to swim across the Thai-Cambodian border if he did so. It is a land border. There is no river or creek or stream.

he was told that the number he was calling was definitely not the CIA, he hung up.

Barnes went to the border in a rented car, with driver, as most everyone does. Or at least he said he went to the border. When he returned he called me again and told me that he'd had a "real good trip." He had sneaked out to the frontier, he said, "and I swam across and had a look around and then came back."

Barnes is the first person in recorded history to swim across the Thai-Cambodian border if he did so. It is a land border. There is no river or creek or stream. There is an anti-tank trench a few miles long, but with all the Thai Army security there, he could hardly "sneak" up to it. In any case he couldn't swim across it since it never has much water even at the height of the rainy season. Besides it would not require more than two low strokes to cross if you were absolutely determined to get your clothes wet.

He certainly couldn't swim the *klong* (canal) a little to the south. It is almost too narrow for any meaningful jumping exercise.

That is what Barnes told me happened on his first trip to Thailand. His second trip must have been a lot more exciting; at least his story is extremely inventive. First of all, he claims he came back in October with five other American "team members." They and about 30 Hmong combatants from the former Vang Pao force clandestinely crossed the Mekong River from the Thai village of Ban Pheng to Laos, "west of Mahaxay."

This is neither a helpful nor very possible exercise. Ban Pheng, in northern Nakhon Phanom Province in the Thai northeast, and the Laotian town of Mahaxay, east of Savannakhet, may have looked close together on Barnes' Esso version of a tactical map.

In fact, they are some 120 kilometers apart, and Mahaxay is 40 clicks inland from the Mekong, which is the border between Laos and Thailand. On the map, to go from Ban Pheng to "west of Mahaxay" would mean he spent some 80 or so kilometers to cross a river less than a mile wide. That's some river crossing.

And saying that this alleged American-Laotian special warfare team crossed "from Ban Pheng to west of Mahaxay" is less geographically informative than telling someone trying to find your house for dinner that it is "in Orange County, Calif."

Barnes claims that a team similar to his had preceded him into Laos, as part of what he calls "Operation Velvet Glove" (the actual name of this operation was Operation Grand Eagle), to try to obtain photographic proof that U.S. prisoners were being held in Laos.

He told CAIB and the *Daily World* that the first team had been captured. The CIA ordered him and his team to locate the first, try to rescue them, but to kill them if necessary to keep them from talking.

The only identification he carried — or at least was able to produce later — is what the *Daily World* called an "official-looking business card, embossed with the seal of the United States Congress, identifying them as members of the staff of then U.S. Congressman Robert K. Dornan (R-Calif.)."

Asked by the newspaper why the CIA would want to kill members of the first team, Barnes speculated that "possibly the United States was involved in getting chemical warfare, biological stuff, over there." In other words, the first team was "seeding" false evidence which later would be picked up by Laotian resistance members or others.

Barnes also said he carried back from Thailand a letter from a Laotian to Daniel C. Arnold, a former CIA sta-

tion chief in Laos and now a private consultant based in northern Virginia, just outside the District of Columbia. Barnes said Arnold "was a major figure in the Laos infiltration operation." Why carrying a letter from a refugee to Arnold would be sinister isn't explained by the publications.

Arnold himself told the *Daily World* that he had helped several prominent Laotians escape the 1975 communist takeover (which indeed he did) and that he received — and forwarded to Vang Pao and former cabinet chief Chao Sisouk — the letter Barnes took back from Thailand.

The credibility of Barnes is some what strained when he identifies the Bangkok CIA station chief as Mike Eiland, or, as he spells it, "Island" Eiland, a cross-border SF operative in Vietnam, is a military officer on loan to the State Department, who has been widely praised for his work as head of the U.S. Embassy's Cambodian refugee relief program. The CIA station chief in Bangkok can be found, as at a such "open stations" in the world, I anyone with some smarts and an ex-bassy telephone directory.

Bo Gritz, that colorful ex-SF officer who has recently come under criticism for his own role in the POW/MIA question, was unable or unwilling to confirm that Barnes played any part in the Laotian infiltration mission.

I wasn't too mystified. I made up my mind Barnes was overly excited about the idea of bringing back POWs. I thought he was highly paranoid, and avoided contact with him.

He left Thailand after a couple weeks. He did begin to talk to old newsmen in the United States about POWs and U.S. government action against those committed to the cause. Most of them, it seems, took his story with the same truckloads of salt. He finally had to peddle his Thai adventures to leftist publications.